

PROTECTING SIRHAN SIRHAN, Robert Kennedy's Killer

Part 2

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ARRAIGNMENT

Gar Austin was captain of the Detective Bureau, and was on call to handle any major incident the night Sirhan killed Robert Kennedy. Undersheriff Downey was notified by LAPD that they would be bringing Sirhan to the Hall of Justice at 6 a.m. The undersheriff called Captain Austin and instructed him to report to the Hall of Justice immediately, because LAPD would be bringing Sirhan over to the Hall of Justice to be arraigned. Austin called several large-statured deputies who were assigned to Robbery and Homicide to respond to the Hall of Justice to assist him in protecting and controlling Sirhan. SEB deputies who had been backing up LAPD at the Ambassador Hotel responded to the Hall of Justice to assist with Sirhan.

LAPD had taken Sirhan to Parker Center until he was going to be arraigned at 6 a.m. In order for Sirhan not to be spotted as he was transported from Parker Center to the Hall of Justice Jail, he was transported in the back of an LAPD investigator's personal camper. LAPD brought Sirhan up the elevator to the courtroom on the eighth floor of the Hall of Justice for his arraignment. Superior Court Judge Joan Dempsey Cline was called at home and came in early at 6 a.m. to arraign Sirhan. Crime Reporter John Q. Brown was the only reporter who showed up that morning. He took a few photos of Captain Gar Austin escorting Sirhan through the hallway after his arraignment.

Deputy Larry Giger was working in patrol car 11 Adam at Firestone Station on early morning shift the day that Kennedy was shot. 11A, 11B and 10 Sam were designated as emergency response units that morning that would respond to any emergency situation in the county. Those three units were requested to respond to the Hall of Justice to escort Sirhan from the Hall of Justice Jail to Men's Central Jail.

As Sirhan was being arraigned, the three units from Firestone Station, along with the SEB units, formed up to transport Sirhan.

After his arraignment, Sirhan was taken by elevator down to the basement, escorted to the jail compound and placed in the backseat of a night

detective unit. Two radio cars led the way, followed by the detective unit that was transporting Sirhan. Following behind the DB unit were two more radio cars. They all rolled Code 3 (lights and sirens) down Spring Street to Los Angeles County Men's Central Jail. They were ordered not to stop for anything.

When they arrived safely behind the compound gates at Inmate Reception Center (IRC), Sirhan was removed from the detective unit. At the same time, four lines of inmates were exiting IRC to be loaded onto buses so that they could be transported to court. One inmate yelled, "That's the guy who shot Kennedy!" Some of the inmates broke free and started toward the deputies. At least four of the escort deputies were carrying shotguns, and they simultaneously racked and leveled the shotguns at the inmates. The inmates stopped their charge and went back into their lines. The transportation deputies who were escorting the inmates to the buses regained control of the line of inmates and then loaded them onto transportation buses.

Captain Austin, along with the backup deputies, brought Sirhan into the Inmate Reception Center. The captain stayed and followed Sirhan through the entire booking process. Austin used to work fingerprints, so he was very proficient at fingerprinting people. He rolled two extra fingerprint cards for the detectives. As Sirhan was being fingerprinted, he complained

that his finger hurt. Sirhan's finger was injured just after he fired his gun and ex-football player Rosey Grier wrestled the gun from Sirhan's hand, bending his finger back.

MEN'S CENTRAL JAIL

In 1968, Deputies Allen Koppe-rud and Brent Mahar were prowlers on 7000, which is the second floor of the hospital area of Men's Central Jail. They were instructed to choose an isolated room that couldn't be seen from the outside of the jail to place Sirhan in. They searched the floor and decided on a room that was isolated. They then moved inmates out of the adjacent rooms.

Deputies Brent Mahar and Bob Livingston were called down to the watch commander's office on the first floor of Men's Central Jail. The watch commander informed them that he had a special assignment for them. The assignment was to pick up a high-profile inmate from Inmate Reception Center, transport him up to 7000 and stay with him the entire shift. Deputies



Captain Gar Austin escorting Sirhan to his arraignment

Mahar and Livingston went over to IRC and found Sirhan Sirhan sitting in a wheelchair. His foot had been injured when he was tackled by Rosey Grier after shooting Robert Kennedy. When Mahar and Livingston got off work that day, they were the only two deputies guarding Sirhan.

Sheriff Peter J. Pitchess wanted to see how close someone could get to Sirhan, so he sent his driver to go into to Central Jail and try to enter Sirhan's room.



Sheriff Pitchess holding a press conference about Sirhan Sirhan

The Sheriff's driver was able to get inside Sirhan's room without an escort. When he reported back to the Sheriff, Pitchess flipped out. He told the Custody Division chief that he wanted security around Sirhan like no other.

Just five years prior to Sirhan killing Robert Kennedy, Lee Harvey Oswald killed Robert's brother, President John F. Kennedy, and then Oswald was killed while in custody by Jack Ruby. Sheriff Pitchess was very concerned that Sirhan might be killed while in the custody of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, and he did everything in his power to prevent that from happening. He put into place some of the strictest procedures and security features so that Sirhan's life would never be in danger.

The day after Sirhan arrived at Central Jail, Deputy Mahar reported to work at 7000 and discovered that there were now 21 deputies assigned to Sirhan's around-the-clock security team.

Sirhan was considered a high-profile inmate and was housed in 7000 at Central Jail while security measures were being implemented at the Hall of Justice Jail. In 7000, Sirhan was placed in a room with all the electrical outlets removed. In the room was a metal-framed bed, toilet and sink. The windows on the room were covered with paper at first, and then with ¼-inch steel plates later on. Every afternoon, Sirhan was given one half-hour of exercise time. His exercise time was spent walking in the hallway outside of this room. When he was placed back in a room, he was never placed in the same room that he left from. A deputy sat in the room with Sirhan and another one sat outside the room on a high chair, so he could see into the room through

the small window in the door. That deputy was instructed to continuously look into the room and not look away. If he did look away from the window while in conversation, he was verbally reprimanded.

Deputies were assigned to the elevator and around the floor to protect Sirhan. Tables were set up right outside the elevator. Two to four deputies were assigned there to search everyone who came off the elevator. Anyone coming into the area where Sirhan was housed was searched, including Sheriff Pitchess. A judge came up to 7000 one day for a legal proceeding, along with the Board of Supervisors, and they were all searched. Deputies coming on duty were searched by the senior deputy who was going off duty. One day a lieutenant who didn't belong there came up into the area. The deputies searched the lieutenant and reported the incident to the Sheriff's office. A.L. Wearing, who was in charge of the Los Angeles branch of the ACLU, came up on the elevator to visit Sirhan. When he came out of the elevator and deputies attempted to search him, he refused, saying, "Do you know who I am?" Mahar said, "No, I don't." Wearing left and returned within two hours with a court order exempting him from being searched. The deputies were upset because everyone else was searched, including the Sheriff. Why was this guy so special? Wearing was allowed to visit with Sirhan to discuss his rights and to make sure they weren't violated.

Deputies who were assigned to the Sirhan security team at Central Jail were told that they would be on the team providing security for Sirhan until he was either convicted or found not guilty. Once it was over, every member of the security team would be allowed to transfer to the job of their choice. Whenever Sirhan went anywhere outside of his room, he was escorted by two deputies.



Deputies provided security for Sirhan at all times, including when he was interviewed for a TV show.

When Sirhan was first arrested and placed in Central Jail, he was afraid that someone was going to try to poison him. Because of this, the only thing he would eat were wrapped candy bars. Eventually, a cook was assigned to him to cook his meals separately from all the other inmates. The preparation of Sirhan's food was supervised by a deputy, and then the food was brought up to 7000. After that, he began eating the specially prepared meals.

This story will be continued in the July issue. ☆